

*Second
and English
Lutheran*

- Church Fathers (1840)

Second English Lutheran Church was blessed with two fathers: Our Heavenly One and John Gottlieb Morris. As J. G. Morris, pastor of the English Evangelical Lutheran Church of Baltimore, met on April 16, 1840, with his congregation at the church on Lexington Street, it was to spread the gospel and to further his vision of Lutheranism conveyed in the English language, increasingly welcoming and accessible to youth, non-Germans, and the unchurched. It was, however, to be firmly rooted in Lutheran doctrine and heritage, thus resistant to drowning in a sea of generalized American Protestantism.

Since his call in 1827 to the young English Lutheran Church, formed by former members of the German usage Zion Lutheran Church, Morris had succeeded in developing a base for the next step. The minutes of April 16, 1840 -- the first recorded in Second's annals -- reflect enthusiastic agreement that "... the time has come to establish a second English Lutheran Church in this city." Not only was it Christ's command "to exert ourselves in extending His Kingdom by affording others the means of grace..." but "the increasing population of our city and our inability to accommodate more hearers in our present house of worship, make it expedient to organize another congregation in Baltimore and to do all in our power to promote it."

Much prayerful effort by Morris and the lay trustees elected by First's congregation to launch Second ensued. With the adoption by its subscribers on January 14, 1841, of articles of incorporation and constitution, The Second English Evangelical Lutheran Church of Baltimore came into existence.

In Second's tenuous early years, J. G. Morris proved an unfailing, generous source of counsel and moral and financial support. Truly, a "father" of Second, he also became "father" to Third English several years later.

Author's Note: This vignette does not begin to do justice to the life, influence and accomplishments of John Gottlieb Morris (1803-1895). A transplant from Pennsylvania to Maryland in 1827, he was a Renaissance man -- pastor, denominational leader, scientist, scholar, bibliophile, cultural advocate, founder of Lutherville, husband and parent. For more, see Michael J. Kurtz, John Gottlieb Morris: Man of God, Man of Science (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1997).

- A Young Pastor's Insight (1842)

By mid-1842, Second English Lutheran's building on Lombard Street had a roof, a meeting room and a burgeoning debt. The debt was the result of a default by a major pledger of capital. In a leap of faith, Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883) began in September, 1842, as Second's first pastor.

Krauth was a novice, only 19. Son of a pastor, he was born in Martinsburg and graduated from Gettysburg Seminary. Well recommended, his father was Charles Philip Krauth, then president of Pennsylvania (now Gettysburg) College, and his friend was John G. Morris, pastor of First English in Baltimore and key founder of Second in 1841. He also came cheap. His pay for the first six months totaled \$100, increased to \$350 a year in 1843 and to \$450 in 1845.

Pastor Krauth's ministry at Second was one of personal maturation, including marriage in 1844, professional learning and fine preaching, which included revivals ("protracted meetings") then prevalent in American Protestantism. It was plagued, however, by unrelenting financial pressures that kept the church on the brink of extinction and was barely saved by a temporary rescue by First English.

In May, 1847, physically depleted, Pastor Krauth decided not to stand for reelection (Second's constitution required annual election of the pastor). The separation was amicable. After a trip abroad, he returned restored, and served in Virginia and Pennsylvania emerging as a giant of Lutheranism in the 19th century United States, including the presidency of Philadelphia Seminary and vice-provost of the University of Pennsylvania. He was a major force for conservative Lutheranism in America.

What insight did our young pastor reach that might serve pastoral call committees? Put verbosely in a letter to Second's congregation on May 20, 1845, he notes that he has learned "the powerful agency of direct Christian converse between Pastor and People. Without changing my opinion at all as to the truth -- that Preaching the everlasting Gospel in its fullness is the preeminent business of the Preacher, I have realized more and more that to do this requires that exact acquaintance and entire sympathy with his people which only frequent, regular and Christian visits as a pastor can secure."

- A Sudden Departure (1859)

Pastoral turnover is a part of congregational life. It happened often in the early decades of Second English Lutheran Church in Baltimore. Reasons varied, as did the amount of notice and depth of explanation. A poignant departure occurred in 1859.

In mid-1858, the Rev. J. A. Seiss, pastor since 1852, had resigned. The council chose a three-man "Committee of Invitation" (Elders Bridges and Getty and Trustee Stockbridge) to seek a successor. In April, 1859, they recommended that the Rev. Charles M. Hersh be called at a salary of \$1,800 per year. He was installed in June.

Pastor Hersh was 35 years old, single, born in New Oxford, Adams County, Pennsylvania, one of ten brothers and two sisters. Since graduating from Pennsylvania College (now Gettysburg College) in 1851 and Gettysburg Seminary in 1853, he had served small congregations in Pennsylvania and New York.

The story continues from a final tribute to Pastor Hersh, written by a close friend and classmate and published in the LUTHERAN OBSERVER in November, 1859:

"In June last he was elected pastor of the Second English Lutheran Church of Baltimore, in which field we hoped he would be permitted to labor for many years....Among other reasons, Br. Hersh was induced to accept the call to Baltimore in the hope of improving his health, which had already begun to decline in the North. Such was his infirm condition, however, that the brethren kindly urged him to retire to his quiet home in Oxford until restored, they supplying the pulpit regularly. Stimulated, doubtless, by pastoral anxiety, in October he returned to Baltimore, and located among his people. He was permitted but once to preach Christ to them after his return. The administration of the Lord's Supper was his last official act."

Pastor Hersh died. A stunned council adopted resolutions of grief and sympathy, voted six month's salary to his estate, and returned to the drawing board. Lessons for our future call committees:

- 1) Avoid the "North."
- 2) Carry a stethoscope.
- 3) Do not over-extol Baltimore as a health resort.

- God and the Constitution (1864)

Christ The Sovereign of the Nation

As the Rev. Joel Swartz, pastor at Second 1861-1865, rose to preach on Sunday morning, December 4. 1864, his sights were set on what, in a very long sermon, he decried as a fatal weakness in the Constitution of the United States and on the need to quickly amend that otherwise admirable document before other catastrophes, comparable to the ongoing, bloody Civil War, befell the nation.

The basic problem, Pastor Swartz declared, was the absence from our constitution of God and Jesus Christ. He noted that he had been to conferences in Ohio and Pennsylvania of other like-minded Protestant "Christian patriots" and had concluded that the preamble to the constitution must be amended as follows (additions underlined):

"We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Ruler among the nations, and His revealed will as of supreme authority, in order to constitute a Christian government, and in order to constitute a more perfect union, establish justicedo ordain and establish this CONSTITUTION for the United States of America." "And we further ask that such changes be introduced into the body of the Constitution, as may be necessary to give effect to these amendments in the preamble."

Rev. Swartz, a precursor of today's "Christian right," decried the secular nature of the constitution and its neutrality toward religion. He pointed to constitutions of the American colonies and the Declaration of Independence, which acknowledged "God," "nature's God" and the "Creator" as bases for freedom. He denounced the idea that "religion and politics should not mix" and that the "pulpit should not touch it (*civil government*)" as "worse than heathenish nonsense." He ascribed most of the evils of the nation to the failure to formally acknowledge Christ's sovereignty in its fundamental document. We would be a happy nation, indeed, if that were promptly done, he assured his congregation, and urged members to sign a petition to that end. Pastor Swartz ended with a rousing poem of six verses, the last of which reads:

"We hail thee, Jehovah, our NATIONAL GOD,
And kissing thy Son, we reverence the rod
That hath taught us our sin, and welt'ring in blood
We humbly return to thee.
O write, if need be, with a finger of fire,
On our Temple of Freedom, gilding her spire,
"CHRIST JESUS OUR SOVEREIGN SHALL BE."

Comment: Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Paul A. Baglyos, pastor at Zion Lutheran Church of Penbrook, Harrisburg, PA, for bringing this sermon (published at the direction of Second's council by J.B. Rose & Co., Baltimore, 1864) to our attention. Pastor Baglyos cited it in a paper he presented at the Lutheran Historical Society, Gettysburg, in April, 1998, on the topic "The Embattled Pulpit: Preaching and War." He focused on the War of 1812 and the Civil War. Please see Fred Schilling if you would like to read the entire sermon

- Decorum in the Sanctuary (1890)

Second's council meetings in the 19th century were generally dull affairs. One proved otherwise. The May 17, 1890, meeting began as usual at the home of Brother James Getty, finances and property the foci as always. The faithful gentlemen present had served together for years, most for decades. Death and illness, rather than the annual elections, were the prime determinants in lay turnover on council. Little wonder: council served as the nominating committee, and there were no term limits.

The routine shattered when Brother John Rice moved that Pastor Sylvanus Stall (called from Lancaster, Pennsylvania in mid-1888) be authorized by council to address the congregation "concerning the misbehavior of some who attend the church services and urge them to observe proper decorum in God's house."

What was this misbehavior? The problem, the pastor explained to council, was the spittoons in the pews. He urged their immediate removal. The council minutes are not clear whether Rev. Stall's complaint was the poor aim of the users or the habit giving rise to these embellishments. In any case, a motion for removal of the items was presented and defeated.

Undaunted, or too new to recognize the thin ice he was on, Pastor Stall returned to the fray, imploring the council members to reconsider. In deference to his plea, the matter was reopened. Finally, a second motion emerged and was adopted. As one can see, it would have done Solomon proud. It read: "That they (*the spittoons*) be removed except when members wished them retained." Thus were individual liberty and the current state of decorum preserved!

Pastor Stall departed Second English six months later for a post on the Lutheran Observer. Editorializing must have seemed preferable to dealing with council.